



Connecticut State Dental Association

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**Legislative Testimony
Governor's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan
Appropriations Committee
December 9, 2009
Bruce Tandy, D.M.D.**

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Bruce Tandy. I am a private practice general dentist in Vernon and Coventry. I am also the President of the Connecticut State Dental Association (CSDA). Please accept this as my written testimony urging your careful thought and consideration when deliberating over the Governor's proposed elimination of adult Medicaid dental care other than emergency dental services as part of the budget mitigation plan. It was only 10 months ago when this concept was first debated. Fortunately, the dollars were maintained and we have seen increased utilization by those in need. However, the state's finances have deteriorated and there are more people, who cannot afford oral health care, than ever before. Now is not the time to cut back these dollars.

Access to oral health care in Connecticut for those individuals who do not have insurance or the financial means to seek treatment has been problematic since I entered practice 30 years ago. The State of Connecticut had in place a Medicaid program that provided limited benefits to those who qualified. Reimbursement levels to practicing dentists were one third of the UCR from private insurance making all treatment provided to this population a losing business proposition for those dentists who participated in the plan. The reimbursement rates were not the only issue, with administrative inadequacies and a failure of the target population to seek, schedule, and follow-up on the appointed care. This kept the number of participating health care providers low. Those that did provide care did so without seeking reimbursement, eliminating the administrative difficulties and helping where they could.

Finally, 3 years ago, following the settlement of a 7 year lawsuit to increase Medicaid reimbursements for children under the age of 21, a move in a positive direction occurred. The suit allocated dollars, at least enough for the private practitioner to not lose money on every child treated, made administrative changes at DSS and EDS, and added educational programs for the target population, as well as case workers to manage patient flow. Dentist participation increased to over 1,000 private practitioners and 200 public health dentists and hygienists. The target population was children but dentists, despite being reimbursed at half the Husky rate for children, were also seeing the adults that needed care along with their youngsters. There was now finally a positive change in the access to oral health care problem in Connecticut.

The present financial crisis has put huge constraints on the ability of state government to serve the needs of the citizens of Connecticut. The Governor's original budget cut out all dollars and cents except for emergency oral health care treatment for adult Medicaid patients. Fortunately, the legislature saw the necessity of maintaining these dollars in an ever more challenging economic environment as unemployment and financial hardship increased to record levels.

At the Connecticut Mission of Mercy event last April, a 2 day charitable dental clinic provided by the CSDA and volunteers from around the state, the dental team treated 1,850 people, most of whom were adults in the category that will be most affected by these proposed cuts. I was in charge of the triage portion of the event and met every patient that was treated. The stories were varied but mostly revolved around the lack of access to care due to financial hardship and the limited number of doctors and facilities that accepted adult dental Medicaid. With the upcoming event this March in Middletown, we expect to treat over 2,000 of these patients, barely touching the surface of those who will be seeking treatment. Many of these patients will wind up seeking treatment in emergency rooms of hospitals, a much more costly option than dentists offices or safety net facilities that can no longer afford to treat this target population with the loss of the limited Medicaid dollars

With the increasing unemployment numbers there will be more individuals seeking state help through the Medicaid program than ever before. To cut these dollars now, when the need is greatest, is not what I believe government is about. The dentists have stepped up to the plate to improve the oral health of this population through the MOM project, increased participation in Medicaid, developing public education programs with

CPTV, joining in the Home by One pilot project, and advocating for the expansion of school based oral healthcare programs. Oral health has been shown to not only effect the mouth, but the overall health of the individual. The cost in the future to repair the oral and physical health of the citizens of Connecticut by failing to prevent and treat health problems now, will ultimately be a financial quagmire, especially as the debate on national health care policy continues. Government needs to do its part and not put off the higher costs to another day.

Please reconsider these proposed budget cuts and maintain this investment in the health of the citizens you serve.

Respectfully Submitted,

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